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Russia Accused of Shelling, Sabotaging Ukraine Flood Evacuations

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Evacuation efforts in the village of Hola Prystan, located on the left bank of the Dnipro River in the Kherson region. **Alexei Konovalov / TASS**

Ukrainian officials and residents of Russian-occupied areas downstream from the collapsed Kakhovka dam said Russian forces have shelled evacuees and sabotaged Ukraine's rescue efforts.

"Russian terrorists are trying to further aggravate the situation they have caused with their ecocide," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a video message early Friday after visiting Kherson.

Kyiv and Moscow accuse each other of destroying the Russian-held dam in southern Ukraine's Kherson region on Tuesday and unleashing a humanitarian and environmental catastrophe. Ukraine and its Western allies called the dam collapse a war crime.

Thousands have been forced to flee, 150 have gone missing, and at least 16 people were reported to have died from flooding on both the Ukrainian- and Russian-controlled sides of

the Dnipro River.

Ukraine's Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar published a video of what she said was Russian shelling during the evacuation of Kherson following Zelensky's Thursday visit.

A BBC correspondent said she witnessed bloodied passengers on rescue boats in areas of Kherson that came under Russian artillery shelling.

Zelensky said the Russian shelling of evacuation points was "absolutely deliberate." He also accused the Moscow-installed authorities on the other bank of "completely abandoning" residents.

The Financial Times, citing residents of the Russian-controlled left bank and volunteers, reported that Russian soldiers did not allow evacuations for two days before large-scale rescue efforts began on President Vladimir Putin's orders Thursday.

"Many people have drowned. Bodies have started to emerge," Nina, a volunteer in the flooded town of Oleshky, told FT.

"Hundreds have died," another volunteer, Yaroslav Vasilyev, told the independent news outlet iStories on Thursday.

Zelensky told Politico the true toll of the disaster would remain unknown for "a few days" until the water recedes.

The Kremlin said Friday that rescuers were "acting selflessly" and working "energetically" in the flood-hit areas under Russian control.

Meanwhile, deaths from direct Russian-Ukrainian clashes continued amid the evacuation efforts.

Kherson's regional military administration said Russian strikes in the center of Kherson and the surrounding region killed two people and injured 17 more, including emergency services staff.

Moscow-installed authorities on the opposite bank said two evacuees were killed by Ukrainian shelling.

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